

## Traditional South American Foods

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### ANNOTATION

Every continent boasts of a crazy array of unusual, delicious foods, and South America is no exception. South America is about diversity, and the best way to experience the diversity is through its food. South America naturally boast of a diverse array of wonderful concoctions. South American foods fuse native ingredients with European, Asian, and African influences. Every South American nation has its own unique dishes and specialties to sample. This paper will help you discover some of the many culinary surprises this colorful continent has to offer, no matter which of its twelve countries you visit.

**KEYWORDS:** food, culture, diet, traditional food, south American foods, Latin American foods.

### INTRODUCTION

South America is one of the favorite continents to visit due to the incredible food and meals to be eaten while there. Street food is often the best choice, tasty, delicious, and affordable. Traditional South American food is as diverse as one would expect for a colorful continent made up of almost 450 languages, 430 million people, and 12 nations (not including French Guiana, and the British Falklands). Food is a major part of Latin American culture. It is a pleasant way to immerse yourself in the culture while enjoying delicious food. South American food might be the most varied in the world, with many local specialties and international dishes. South America has become an important market for protein suppliers in recent years.

The Latin American and Caribbean regions have different characteristics when compared to other regions of the world. Long before the Europeans came to South America, the indigenous people cultivated an incredible array of plants. They grew corn, lima beans, potatoes, sweet potatoes, chili peppers, avocados, peanuts, and chocolate. Each region developed its own traditional dishes. European brought livestock and foods to South America, such as pigs, chickens, citrus trees, wheat, almonds, cows, and goats. Asian and African immigrants brought their culinary traditions as well. All of this blended to make South America diverse in food and culture. There is no denying that colonization and immigration brought many changes to the continent.

## TRADITIONAL STAPLES

Common ingredients in South American flavorful dishes are corn, potatoes, cassava, chiles, beans, seafood, beef, chicken, etc. The key South American staples include the following [1,2]:

- *Corn*: Corn (or maize) is the key ingredient of many staple dishes, such as arepas (cornbread), tamales, various pasteles and chicha. Corn is possibly South America's biggest food contribution to the rest of the world.
- *Potatoes*: Potatoes are fried, mashed, freeze dried, baked, and combined with sauces into several delicious dishes. Their rival is corn as the oldest and most important South American crop.
- Beans and rice are another staple in Latin American countries. *Gallo Pinto*, a mixture of rice and beans is often served at every meal in many of the countries. Beans have a high iron content and the different processes they can undergo, such as cooking, grinding, and fermenting can improve iron absorption.
- *Peppers*: Peppers are the most important seasoning ingredient in South American cooking. There are varieties of peppers.
- *Fruits*: They are often eaten as dessert throughout the day. South American dishes make great use of tropical fruits such as coconut, cherimoya, mango, guava, pineapple, papaya, lucuma, banana, plum, melon, etc.
- *Vegetables*: These include tomato, lettuce, chili peppers, squash, onions, lettuce, eggplant, zucchini, and corn. They are an ingredient in *picadillo*s as well as used in stews and salads.
- *Cassava*: This is starchy edible root of the yucca plant. It is popular in Brazil, where the root is ground, dried, and roasted to make farofa. Farofa is a key ingredient in the famous Brazilian dish feijoada, a pork and black bean stew. Cassava flour is often used in baking, as in the delicious Brazilian cheese rolls pão de queijo. Figure 1 displays Fried cassava snack made from cassava root and served fried at traditional south American restaurant [3].

## DISHES FROM SOUTH AMERICA

South American dishes tend to be exotic and tasty. They are characterized with meat dishes, corn breads, and delicious fish recipes. Several iconic dishes are presented in the tasteatlas of Figure 2, which one discovers while exploring the continent and its glorious food [4]. Here is a list of 20 Latin American nations and their respective national dish [5]:

1. Argentina: Asados
2. Bolivia: Salteñas
3. Brazil: Feijoada
4. Chile: Pastel de Choclo
5. Colombia: Bandeja paisa
6. Costa Rica: Gallo Pinto

7. Cuba: Ropa Vieja
8. Dominican Republic: La Bandera
9. Ecuador: Ceviche
10. El Salvador: Pupusa
11. Guatemala: Pepián
12. Honduras: Plato Típico
13. Mexico: Mole
14. Nicaragua: Gallo Pinto
15. Panama: Sancocho de Gallina Panameño
16. Paraguay: Sopa Paraguaya
17. Peru: Ceviche
18. Puerto Rico: Arroz con Gandules
19. Uruguay: Chivito
20. Venezuela: Pabellón Criollo

Keep in mind that the rating of the foods is subjective, depending on personal experience. Others may consider another dish as the national dish. We provides details on some of these various dishes [6-10]:

1. *Mexico* is surely a go-to country if you are looking for delicious cuisines. Mexican cuisine originates from Europe, Africa, and India. Mexicans have enchiladas, tacos, beans, and the quesadillas, among others. To them, food is associated with love and family bonding. The traditional method of cooking Cochinita Pibil is what also makes it one of the country's most foods. Tacos are one of the most popular dishes in the Americas. Mexico provides pork, beef, and chicken tacos almost anywhere in the country. Today, authentic Mexican tacos are available in the United States and other parts of the world. In Mexico City, one type of taco reigns supreme: tacos al pastor. The taco consists of three components: a meat, a tortilla, and salsa. There is nothing better than having Mexican tacos in Mexico City. Modern Mexican cuisine has been shaped by the varying climates of the different regions, the geography of each region, as well as the influence of Spanish and Mediterranean culinary traditions brought over during colonization. Figure 3 shows Mexican tacos [7]. You should try the real deal when visiting Mexico.

2. *Brazil's* people typically eat yam, tapioca, or rice along with pork or beef stew. Pastel is Brazil's famous and favorite snack. It is a deep-fried stuffed thin-crust pastry, sweet or savory. It is eaten any time of the day. The origins of Pastel are linked with the Japanese immigrants who opened the first Chinese restaurants in Brazil. Figure 4 shows some pastels [3]. Feijoada is another favorite food in Brazil. It is the national dish of Brazil and a source of enormous pride among Brazilians. Feijoada is the most traditional national dish in Brazil. It is a mix of black beans cooked on low heat with beef and pork for hours and hours, stewed to perfection. Feijoada a moderately heavy, thick, and tasty meal. It is typically served with a tableful of sides: rice, fried yucca, slices of orange sautéed greens, crispy pork rinds, and fried cassava. Because of the cooking time to prepare it well, and the number of ingredients,

it is typically taken as a weekend meal. Bauru is another true Brazilian class. It is a sandwich consisting of a crusty bread roll without the soft bread inside, stuffed with melted cheese, tomatoes, sliced pickles, and roast beef.

3. *Cuba* has no official national dish. But Cuban flan is one dessert one will find on every menu in the nation. Rice and beans are main staples in Cuba and many Latin American nations. Beans cooked in broth with spices are commonly served with meat stews, vegetable stews, poultry, and seafood. No matter what rice or beans you try, it is the perfect meal to eat with fried plantains. A typical Cuban dish of rice and beans is displayed in Figure 5 [8]. Every Cuban eats flan and grows up learning how to whip up this easy recipe. Due in part to trade restrictions and food-supply issues, Cuban cuisine does not tend to be as exciting as many of its Caribbean neighbors. Ropa Vieja is a traditional Cuban dish which is made with shredded beef, tomato sauce, onions, and peppers. Cubans usually try to reduce waste by reusing anything they can.

4. *Ecuador*: Tamale is abundant in Ecuador. It is a traditional dish made of starch and filling, wrapped in a corn husk or banana leaf in order to keep filling together while being steamed. The filling is a mixture of cornmeal, meat, vegetables, and spices. As Tamale became portable, it became the food for people on the move and also an excellent snack in between meals. Tamale wrapped in corn leaves is shown in Figure 6 [9]. Locro is another traditional mouth-watering Ecuadorian potato and cheese soup. Ingredients of the soup are abundant in the highlands of the country: potatoes, milk and cheese. It is usually topped with fresh soft cheese, avocado, and corn/amizet. A visitor should add locro de papas to their list of traditional food to taste while in Ecuador.

5. *Bolivia*: As an Andean nation, Bolivian cuisine is rooted in staples such as quinoa, corn, rice, and potatoes. Salteña is a popular traditional food in Bolivia. Some regard it as the freshest of the freshest. It consists of delicious pastries filled with beef, chicken potatoes, peas, carrots, spices, and even olives mixed together. Most locals eat salteñas in the morning and lunch. The city of Sucre is supposed to have the best salteñas in the country.

6. *Peru*: Peruvian food is among the most famous and exported of all of South America and it is probably the best place to start. Peru is probably best known for two things: potatoes and corn, which are served in different ways. Delicious dishes one should really try include ceviche, lomo saltado, and rocoto relleno. Ceviche is a seafood dish made from fresh raw fish cured in lemon or lime juice with a touch of red peppers, onions, and coriander. It does not require any cooking since the raw fish is cooked by the acidity of the juice. The town of Trujillo in Peru is popular for its unique ceviche. Peruvians also love char-grilled grubs and bull testicles. Ceviche can be found in various forms depending on where you go. A typical ceviche from Peru is shown in Figure 7 [10]. It is recommended to try ceviche when you are close to the ocean so that the fish is fresh.

7. *Venezuela*: Venezuela has a shared border and has a Caribbean coastline. Culinary influences in the country include European, indigenous, Caribbean, and African. Venezuelan favorite dishes differ from region to region. Fresh seafood is favored on the coast and islands, while one could easily eat yucca for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Arepas is a traditional, popular food, much like a taco is in Mexico. Arepas are made from a dough with the basic ingredients of corn flour, water, and salt. They can be baked, fried, or pan-fried. They may have different fillings such as cheese, meats, egg, or avocado. Venezuelan arepas tend to have

more variety of fillings than do Colombian arepas, which focus on cheese and egg or are also eaten plain. Pabellón Criollo is considered Venezuela's national dish. Its main ingredients include black beans, rice, and shredded beef seasoned with onion, garlic, cumin, and tomato. It is served with fried plantain. A typical Pabellón Criollo dish in Venezuela is shown in Figure 8 [11].

8. *Chile*: This country is the world's longest and narrowest nation. The coast line runs from the tropics to the wintry southern tip, which means there is a plenty of seafood. Fishing is a major industry in Chile and it is a major exporters of fish and seafood. Cazuela is a delicious stew made with potatoes, quinoa, capsicum, chilli, corn, and any protein of your choice. Chicken is the most popular meat to use in this dish, but turkey, beef or pork should be fine. The stem is commonly served with noodles or rice. Preparing Chilean cazuela requires cooking all ingredients separately, and then combine them when ready to eat. Traditionally, cazuela is cooked in the cazuela pot. Pisco sour has become one of the most popular dishes in both Peru and Chile.

9. *Guyana*: Bordered by Brazil to the south, Venezuela to the west, and Suriname to the east, Guyana is a unique cross-cultural exchange of many nations. Guyana is the home of South America's most prominent Indian diaspora community, left their mark on the country's cuisine. It is often considered a melting pot of age-old cultures, traditions, and flavors coming from Africa, Britain, the Caribbean, China, Dutch, India, and Portugal. But one thing you will find in almost every kitchen in Guyana is something called bake, which is a soft, deep-fried, semi-sweet puff of bread that seemed to make its way to Guyana by way of the islands of the Caribbean. Guyanese put everything in it from egg and bacalhau. Also fried Bake with salt fish is the quintessential breakfast for most Guyanese. Figure 9 typically shows Bake in Guyana [12].

10. *Caribbean*: The Caribbean is known for many things: friendly locals, lively music, colorful carnivals, sandy beaches, and as a place where you can enjoy some spectacular holidays. A melting pot of cultural influences, each Caribbean island carries its own charm. Latin America and the Caribbean have met both international hunger goals. The Spanish colonized the larger islands of the Caribbean during the turn of the 15th century. Caribbean food is a product of many different cultures and tastes put together. The most important ingredients in Caribbean food are rice, plantains, beans, cassava, cilantro, coriander, bell pepper, chickpeas, tomatoes, sweet potatoes, and coconut. This unique blend of ingredients creates a flavor that is distinctly different from any other type of food [13]. While many nations in the Caribbean have a version of this hearty dish, the Guyanese pepper pot is the most widely eaten.

11. *Argentina*: European influence marks much Argentine cuisine, from the pizza to the pasta. However, nothing says Argentina like Patagonia. A typical Patagonian asado will often feature lamb as the headline act, accompanied by many an offal accoutrement.

12. *Guatemala*: Enchiladas are a typical Latin American dish dating back to the 18th century and originating in Mexico. When the corn tortilla roll soaks up all the juices from the enchilada filling and the sauce, it is heaven. Enchiladas take quite some time to make and require quite a few ingredients. For the filling, one can use ham and chicken, mozzarella cheese, and a host of veggies that finds in my enchilada recipe. Enchiladas can be eaten on



their own, but some prefer to cook them along with guacamole and a nice spicy salsa. If you visit Guatemala, try the enchiladas. You will definitely go back for more the next day.

13. *Puerto Rico*: This nation is the Caribbean paradise known for the vibrant culture, beaches for miles, lively music, and the happiest people in the world. The best reason to visit this country is the cuisine, a fusion of Taíno Indian, Spanish, and African influences, known as Cocina Criolla.

## CHALLENGES

The rest of the world has become interested in the cuisines of South America, and new combinations will emerge. The traditional South American food is changing today. As new immigrants from other parts of the world move to the South, they bring their own food traditions.

The rising prices of food and other things are already a central economic issue of today. Latin America and the Caribbean must not only face hunger but rising obesity and overweight. The increase in the prevalence of childhood overweight in Latin America and the Caribbean is a worrying trend. Overweight and obesity represent a major challenge for governments as they formulate public policies to improve people's food environments.

## CONCLUSION

Traditional food is a big deal in South America. Food tours are becoming very popular in the continent. South American cuisine is known for its diverse variety of dishes incorporating spices as well as cultural influences from lands both near and far away. The continent is home to a wide variety of culinary delights, each using a distinctive combination of spices and fresh ingredients. Many dishes first originated in that nation specifically and from other places of origin such as Africa, Europe, Native American, and Asia. When you travel to any of the nations in South America, you taste the history, the culture, the delicious dishes, and connect deeper with the locals. None of the dishes mentioned above has detrimental effects on the consumers or the environment.

From passion fruit to maize, the influence of South American foods can be felt throughout the world. Spanish language is growing and growing in the US. When you learn Spanish, you get to be a part of a warm culture that is loving and welcoming. More information about traditional South American foods can be found in the books in [14-24] and the following related journals:

- *Nutrition*
- *British Journal of Nutrition*

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Figure 1 Fried cassava snack [3].





Figure 2 Several iconic dishes all over South America [4].



Figure 3 Typical Mexican tacos [7].



Figure 4 Some pastels from Brazil [3].



Figure 5 A typical Cuban dish of rice and beans [8].





Figure 6 Tamale wrapped in corn leaves [9].



Figure 7 A typical Ceviche from Peru [10].



Figure 8 A typical Pabellon Criollo dish in Venezuela [11].





Figure 9 Bake in Guyana [12].